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State Poet Laureate bill discussed in committee

LANSING – A bill to designate a State Poet Laureate received its first hearing May 17 in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, announced Sen. Bruce Patterson, R-Canton.

Patterson, sponsor of Senate Bill 181, and Mr. Mono V. D'Angelo, president of the Poetry Society of Michigan, both testified on the legislation.

“A living person as the State Poet Laureate will embody the state's commitment to this art form in flesh and blood,” Patterson said. “A Poet Laureate can inspire students by visiting schools, conducting workshops and focusing on poetry events around the state. Such events could gain significant attention as cultural festivals of distinction, and build into economically significant events. The present festival at Ludington is a fine model.”

Patterson also spoke of his growing understanding of why the state needed such a position, and how civilization is largely characterized by its arts. He stated poetry in particular encourages more noble thought. He acknowledged that it was former Sen. Thaddeus McCotter, now in the U.S. House, who first made him aware of the value of poetry to the state and its culture.

Mr. D'Angelo read poems by Michigan writers -- one from a sixth-grader, one from an 85-year-old member of the Poetry Society -- to illustrate the character of poetry that transcends boundaries of age, race or place. He urged Senators to consider the inspiration that poetry can provide. Mr. D'Angelo suggested that a State Poet Laureate would embody the art form in a particular way that would help evoke even greater creativity from children and also could help focus such things as poetry events in various parts of the state. This could become economically significant in time.

In 1952, the Michigan Legislature named Edgar Guest the state's Poet Laureate, but after him the title was not continued. Michigan is one of only 11 states in the nation to have no such office. The U.S. Congress established within the Library of Congress a national “Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry” in 1985. The Poet Laureate advises on various matters, may be called upon to “judge” in contests and usually composes special pieces for public occasions.

In Michigan, this would be a gubernatorial appointment, not to exceed the governor's term. No stipend is attached to the position.

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A photo of Sen. Patterson and Mr. D'Angelo is available on the Senate Majority Photowire at
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Patterson/Patterson.htm>